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THE RED TRIANGLE IN THE WAR ZONE

By EDWARD MARSHALL

VERY likely you do not know what I mean by the Red Triangle. There is not a British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African, French or Belgian soldier who is not familiar with it. And all these forces see it constantly. It does not mean cant, hypocrisy, holy Joes, or ceremony; it does mean helpfulness, cleanliness of mind at all times and of body when that may be, comfort for the soul at any rate, good fellowship, good sense.

That doesn't sound much like the usual list of things connected with the work of missionaries. But it is a very partial and imperfect list of what the Red Triangle means in the trenches of this war, in the quieter lands behind the firing line, and in every city of the allied fighting nations where soldiers of the British Empire congregate. The Red Triangle is the sign which says: "Here is to be found a representative of the Young Men's Christian Association."

The organization has been one of the really great influences of the war zone. It has done more to keep the soldiers clean and healthy than have the



sanitary regulations; it has done more to keep them happy than any other thing.

Beneficently it has reached even across the Channel, out of the fighting area into the homeland, to help wives and sweethearts, mothers, fathers and other anxious relatives of loved and perilled ones, for it has been the influence which has kept the men full of the thought of home, not only furnishing them with pens and pencils, paper pads and envelopes, which they scarcely can carry with them in this intense warfare, but inducing them to write home to the "folks in blighty." In this war it has been a sweetening and wholesome influence of the sort that no war ever knew before. It has been truly wonderful.

Red Triangle Huts in the Danger Zone at the Front

Go to the front where the land has been ploughed up by shellfire and just back of the danger zone, often indeed within reach of the enemy shells, you'll find the Red Triangle huts. More than a dozen have been so near that they have been destroyed by enemy artillery. Go to the ports of embarkation and of debarkation and you'll find Red Triangle huts. They do marvellous work. Go to the cities where the lonely soldiers go on leave and the Red Triangle will meet your eye at intervals along the busy streets; and at every railway station guides will be found ready to see to it that the wandering soldier learns the way to friends. Very likely they'll be new friends, but they will be friends.

Take London, for example. It is more a soldier city than New York will be, no matter how completely the United States joins in the war, for it is more really the metropolis and centre of the British Empire than New York ever can be of the United States. The Young Men's Christian Association has been the absolute salvation in material and comfortable as well as spiritual ways of soldiers here ever since the war began.

It has been the guide the counsellor and friend of men on leave, and men on leave need guidance and kind counsel more than most people realize. At many of the big terminals there are sleeping huts. In London there are a score in which men can find beds. They can accommodate thousands of men in London every night. The huts are never closed. A bath or a meal can be had at any hour of day or night.

The other day I went up to the Young Men's Christian Association headquarters in London and there found the genius who has organized the whole war work, found him, in khaki, a uniform specially prescribed for him by the War Office, for Britain recognizes the Young Men's Christian Association as completely as it recognizes the Flying Corps or the Royal Artillery as a necessity of the proper conduct of this war. Many times that khaki that he wears has been in the war zone. Indeed I was in luck to find it out of the war zone. His name is A. K. Yapp.

Yapp is an organizing genius. He is self-effacing. He is of a heart so kindly and so big that there is room in it for every man who fights this good fight for civilization, be he private or commander, sick or well, sober or blind drunk. Yapp never criticises. Yapp hustles when he finds things going wrong and helps toward their correction, always with a very kindly grin.

Material Aid for the Men Comes First

I should like to tell the story of this plain, unemotional man's adventures in his work of helpfulness. It would be as really dramatic as that of any man



3 A.M. IN A LONDON STATION HUT



importantly concerned with the great war. But I haven't space for it. And besides he wouldn't like it.

"Don't worry about religion," Yapp said to me almost at once after I had begun to question him. "Religion is all right. It is the strongest thing in all the world. It can look after itself. Think about the actual work of actually helping actual men. Don't theorize, work.

"Help men materially. You can't help them spiritually if you don't.

"A hungry man is a bad man to whom to suggest prayer. To tell a foolish soldier who has drunk too much that he ought to go to church instead of to the public house is waste of breath. Help him. Then he'll be all right. See to it that he has a chance. If he has a chance he won't go wrong.

"The British fighters in this war are of the right sort. Your soldiers in this war will be of the right sort. Give them an opportunity and they will be as morally clean as they have proved themselves a thousand times to be heroic. That's what we try to do. We try to give the fighting man a chance.

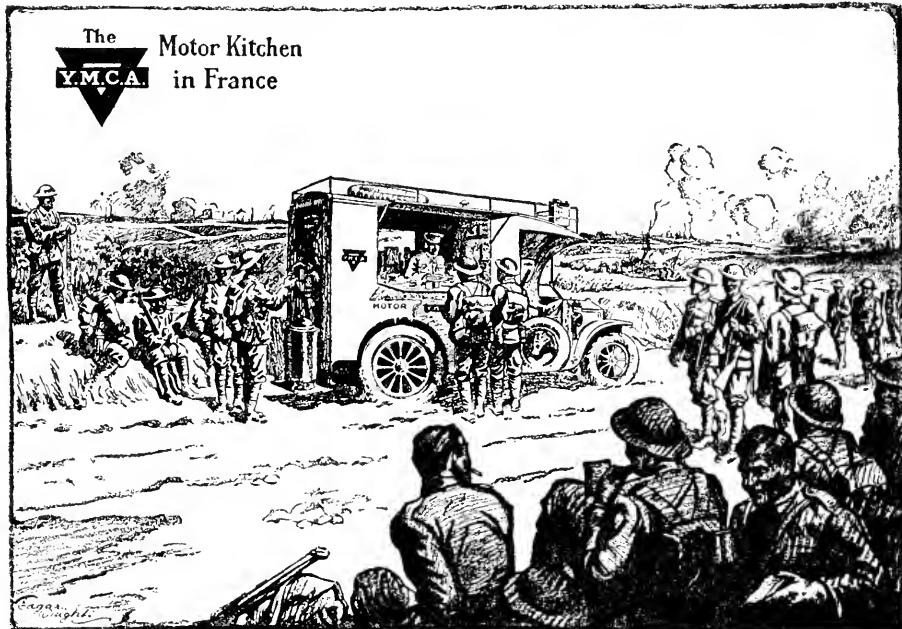
"Of course the public must finance the work. Why shouldn't it? For whom are the soldiers working under such a strain as men in normal life never can know? For the public. Who benefits by the soldier's work and strain and risk, who gains by his health, who loses by his sickness and wounds, by his death? The public. The Red Triangle exists for the soldier and there is every reason, therefore, why the public should help it along.

"But the public in Great Britain by no means pays for all of the Red Triangles or Y. M. C. A. war time activities. They are financed in two ways. First, the general public gives what it will, and in the British Empire as a whole it has been most generous, for the value of the Y. M. C. A. work has been appreciated by the public after it has been reported upon favorably by the military authorities. Second, the Y. M. C. A. itself has paid much—most indeed.

Soldiers Help to Pay Cost of the Enterprise

"It does a certain amount of trading, primarily to help the men, but nevertheless at a profit, since the Young Men's Christian Association is not allowed to undersell regimental canteens. Its customers are told frankly that they help the work along by buying their refreshments at and using the accommodation of the huts. They remain immense gainers by this, because the greater part of the service at the institutions is performed at low cost, and this with wholesale buying enables the Young Men's Christian Association to offer food and accommodations far above the market quality at far less than the market price.

"The men have shown immense appreciation of the public's generosity, since for every pound (\$5) the public has given, the men have spent 10 shillings, or half a pound, of their own money. This makes the drain upon the public no more than fair, for while the men are paid for their services as



soldiers, they are paid comparatively little. And every penny which comes in above actual expenditures is spent upon the maintenance and extension of the work. Hundreds of pounds are spent upon free hot drinks in dugouts in the firing line, in providing refreshment for wounded men crossing back to the field hospitals, in concerts, lectures, games, literature.

"The work, as it has been found wisest to organize it here, is divided into several sections.

"First, there is the section which deals with the soldier and sailor at training camps and with the actual fighting men at the front.

"Second, there are the thousands to be looked after who are at the front neither by sea nor upon land, but nevertheless are fighting for their country. Among the most important of these are the workers in the munition areas.

"The Y. M. C. A. work among the munition workers is very important and chiefly consists of supplying them with refreshments. Here the organization gets much help from the manufacturers themselves, for the Govern-

ment allows them to equip for Y. M. C. A. work out of excess profits which otherwise would go to the State in a very large degree.

"Third, a growing effort is being made to be of use to young men about to go into the army. These include principally boys of 16 or 17. We think nothing could be more vital to the nation's interests than such work as this.

Lesson in War Relief of Value to America

"Fourth, there is the work done in the huts in London and elsewhere, far from the firing line, but where soldiers upon leave or special duty are numerous. We feel that this work has been of especial value in London.

"Fifth, there is the work of the organization in hospitals and convalescent camps.

"With America going into the war there will be almost at once an opportunity for almost all the work which I have indicated, except perhaps that which we do at the front, and when the United States sends over its expeditionary force that work will be of as much value to her soldiery as it has been to ours.

"This work so far has been principally done among the British soldiers at the front and in England. But recently we have been asked by France to set up experimental work in her munition factories.

"Nor is this request from France the only especially gratifying episode which recently has occurred. When the Indian troops first appeared on the firing line we were refused permission to work among them on the ground that we might exercise some influence contrary to their religious faith.

"Finally we were admitted on the ground that our work was not to be propagandist at all. We did not even wear the letters 'Y. M. C. A.' on our badges. What we were able to do was nothing less than wonderful, although, of course, we absolutely kept our pledges. And the Roman Catholics are enthusiastic now also, as are the Jews. In my mail this morning I found a check for \$500 from a Jew.

"The initial difficulty with us, and I should think the same thing likely to be true in the United States, was that from 90 to 95 per cent. of the young men on whom we ordinarily would have relied for the supply of workers were not only eligible but eager for military service. We were left with only the lame, the halt and the blind, so to speak, and those beyond the military age. In this regard we were fortunate in having the active sympathy both of Queen Mary and Queen Alexandra, as well as that of several others of the royal blood.

"The president of the Women's Side is Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein. At the present minute not less than 23,000 women are enroiled under her. Most of them are volunteers and their work is beyond all praise.

Branches in Mesopotamia and India Also

"Each of the self-governing British colonies has developed the effort to a high degree and great things are being accomplished in the dependencies. From India men have come to work not only among the native troops in England and France but have gone for similar work to Mesopotamia and East Africa. It is interesting to note that E. C. Carter, an American, has been at the head of the work in India, and is now serving at the headquarters in London.

"Already we have one branch in the actual Holy land. Some of the best work in Egypt has been done by W. Jessop, who had his training at Washington, D. C. An American helper in religious work who has shown great ability is Dr. Sherwood Eddy.

"Four hundred and twenty-eight Y. M. C. A. branches have been established in France and Flanders for work with the troops, some of them being housed in cellars and ruined houses, some of them even nearer to the firing line being operated in dugouts actually under shell fire.

"They never fail to follow an advance without delay. The day after Bapaume was occupied a Y. M. C. A. man appeared among the troops there, accompanied by a mule laden with cakes and other supplies. A Y. M. C. A. is in full operation in Bagdad, and others are doing fine work at Salonica, Malta and elsewhere.

Discharged Soldiers Are Assisted to Get Along

"We have one big branch in London devised for the especial purpose of helping discharged men to keep from getting down at the heel. We are now in negotiation for a place at which an especial effort will be made to assist those discharged men whose wounds have handicapped them badly. It is a bright, big estate, on which workshops will be established.

"Already we are operating a small farm for men who need sanitarium treatment and who at the same time get training in gardening and poultry farming, and we are just taking over a little temperance inn in Lancashire, where badly handicapped men may remain after the war, doing what they can and continually learning to do more. We hope to plant similar institutions in many other places. In London we are now engaged in the process of taking charge of Ciro's, which used to be a notorious night club.

"In another place we are offered 850 bungalows on 87 acres of land, especially planned and organized so as to help wounded men to futures of comfort and content and independence after the war.

"The work, I think, has been successful because it was started right away and with the thought that it must meet all of the abnormal conditions of the situation. We did not allow tradition to hamper us at all.

"We made new rules. The huts everywhere are big enough, they are well constructed and planned and they are ably managed. So far as we have been able to make them they have produced exactly what the soldiers have needed most and they have been administered upon the broadest lines we could devise.

"Go through them all and you will fail to find a single set of rules posted on the walls. Not even a 'No Swearing' sign appears in any of our huts. The men need no posted rules. They always respect the property and the idea. We take this to be a guarantee of the permanence of the good accomplished.

"I should think your work in America might begin exactly at the point which ours has reached after all these three years of effort. Your organization, which is brilliantly led by Dr. John R. Mott, is worthy of all confidence, and, if adequately supported by the public, as doubtless it will be, will do wonderful work. We need not assure your workers that in England and at the front we shall esteem it a high privilege to work side by side with those who may come over from America to help the soldiers of the Allies, the wounded and the prisoners of war.

"My advice to the American public is to have absolute confidence in the men at the head of the American movement, to give all that they ask for and especially to begin giving very promptly so that the work may start at once.

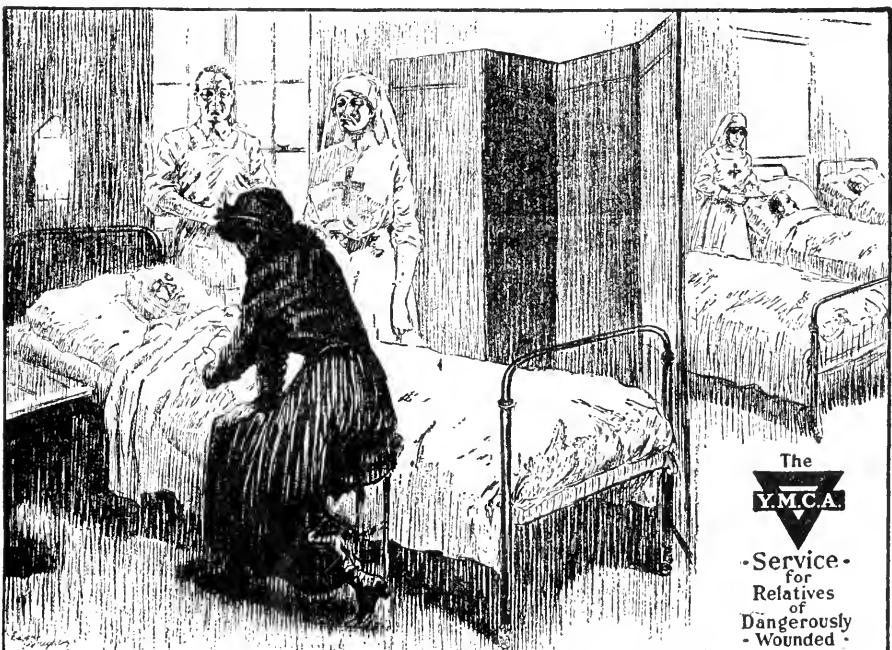
"Now is not too soon even for you in the United States to begin thinking of that enormous problem of what is to happen after the war. Everything possible must be done to keep the men from being let down as soon as they are discharged from the army for any cause.

"We do not force religion on the men. We have prayer meetings, but Tommy does not always crowd them to suffocation. That doesn't matter. Anything that will help him to keep his ideals alive in such times of stress as these is very much worth while. It has been truly said since this war began and our armies crossed the Channel that 'England's future lies in France.' Your future will lie with the men in your army, too, for they will be your young men of greatest virility.

Y. M. C. A.'s Work to Look After Minds and Morals

"No effort can be too great, no expense too mighty, which will serve to preserve them mentally, morally or physically. Your wonderful doctors and self-sacrificing nurses will do everything they can, we all are sure, to look after their health, and the welfare of their minds and morals will be to a considerable extent the affair of organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association.

"I have said that we do not emphasize religious work. That does not mean that we ever forget the third word of our name. We have given away tens of thousands of Testaments, for which the men ask eagerly; many hundreds of thousands of carefully prepared leaflets, which have started many men to careful and constructive thinking, and an unrecorded but immense number of sermons have been preached to the soldiers at the front and elsewhere by our workers.



“Perhaps the most interesting experiences that in the little wooden huts back of the firing line, w ilege to work with the shrapnel helmeted, mud-caked men from the trenches, who have left the shadow of death for a few moments, knowing full well that they soon must enter it again.

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“The parsons at the counter who stand passing out Testaments to those who wish them while tea is being served nearby can learn more in ten minutes than they might learn in ten years at their home churches. The men to whom they speak of soul welfare are likely to listen with keen appreciation, for frequently men’s souls are passing in the very trenches which they have just left and to which they must return even as they talk.

The Association as Essential as Ammunition

“I know fighting men who think the Y. M. C. A. as essential as ammunition to the winning of the war. Hundreds of British churches have sent their pastors to the firing line, and there is an exhilaration in this act of sacrifice. Always the congregation which has done so, will in some way keep up church work during the absence of the minister.

“Not the least important work done by the Y. M. C. A. is that which it has undertaken of escorting and caring for the friends of desperately wounded men who go to the front hospitals to see their dear ones, sometimes to find them dying or even dead. When an official notice is sent to a family that one or more of its members are to be permitted to visit the front for such a melancholy purpose the Y. M. C. A. is simultaneously notified.

“When the relatives arrive in France the organization at once takes care of them and usually sees to it that they are comfortable on the trip across the Channel. It may be that we may have to motor them for as much as a hundred miles from the coast port to the place where their dear one is lying, and we regard them as our guests, supplying them even with lodgings at our hostels during the whole of their stay in France.

Arrange Meetings of the Wounded and Their Friends

“In other words, we are the liaison officers who arrange the meetings between the wounded and their friends. It is sometimes a heartrending task, but it is never one which we are not glad to perform.

“I think it is safe to say that there never is a time when less than 250 friends of wounded men are staying at our hostels in France. Many have reached their loved ones just in time to say farewell. One father arrived when we thought he would be too late and was taken to his boy’s bedside after the lad had become unconscious.

“But the sound of the loved voice roused the sufferer and he raised himself in bed to our amazement, crying, ‘Hello, dad!’ His father took him in his arms just in time to keep him from falling back upon his pillow, dead.

“One word more about the purely religious work. Among those engaged in it are the most celebrated evangelists in the country. John MacNeill, Gypsy Smith, Sherwood Eddy, a Yale man, of whom I have spoken before, and many others work with us. Thousands of clergymen go into our huts to perform the routine work of helpers, serving coffee, for example, sweeping floors, preaching the faith by service as well as by word of mouth.”

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